

## *From a social distance, Toronto's looking good*

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### **Body**

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Nice to see you, readers, to see you nice. Thanks to my former cable company, I had an intense few days of online social distancing, with only a handful of apps offering me news from the land of the connected.

What with a fatal decision I had made regarding passwords, I had full access only to the CBC, Twitter, the Star and, for inexplicable reasons from a former life, Massimo Dutti, a Zara app selling casual office wear.

How strange it has been to hunch over the phone on the couch, in a silent hair salon, on Toronto's empty streets, or just wandering the neighbourhood trying to find a piece of air with thick high-quality Wi-Fi while listening to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau address the nation.

It seemed very 1939, the family huddled around the radio waiting to hear if the war had started. My mother, who is 92, was around then and I asked her if it felt anything like that, or, as has been absurdly suggested, the Blitz, but she said she didn't remember. A former Land Girl who I think spent the war baling hay, she's Scottish and they don't dwell on things.

I do though. I won't name The Little Cable Company That Couldn't because it's unfair, and also because I want to nurse my resentment like a freshly laid egg. After much begging and unhingement on my part, Rogers agreed to take me on and pay a visit.

Here's what I learned as the pandemic kicked in.

Rogers Cable really came through, and it isn't often you hear that. During a pandemic you find out who your friends are (Eric, Natasha and Rammy Rogers) and it's never the people you'd expect. Home is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in, but that isn't true in a pandemic, not if home has its wits about it.

The way to test your family's love will come a month from now when you cut their hair. "Yes, it's shorter but isn't that the definition of a haircut"; try saying that. "I don't think it looks like dog fur."

In unfriendly Toronto, strangers were adorable, grinning at each other across great distances in the subway car, while passive-aggressive status wars played out.

Where did that peculiar couple get those matching yellowy face masks? In the attic, I bet. Oooh, an N95, very fancy.

I try to write with candour - sorry about that - so yes, I devised a face mask of my own, an Ines de la Fressange silk scarf from her Uniqlo line, ineffective but attitudinal, worn bank-robber style over a fresh HEPA filter from the good vacuum cleaner.

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I resent the constant advice from "experts" that N95 masks are ineffective unless correctly fitted, and that plain masks won't keep out your bigger death droplets, only some. They're better than nothing, which is all we ask of gear in a pandemic. My mask keeps out both coronavirus and pet dander.

I don't care to hear the Conservatives saying it's time to cut taxes. Tax revenue is useful in a pandemic, as we learned from Trudeau this week. As opposed to what, heavy tipping?

Other things I learned: there are windows of opportunity for everything, including buying flour in a serious-sized bag, not the cute kind that would fit in a Christmas stocking. On the bright side, the bread maker it requires has not been delivered by Amazon, nor has my copy of the 1722 bestseller "A Journal of the Plague Year."

At a certain point, trains uncaught will not pass by again. Batteries. Bread yeast. New contact lenses.

After days on Twitter, I again see that it is vicious and often wrong but it's actually good if your gamut runs from sentimental to doom-laden with nothing in between. David Wallace Wells, who wrote "The Uninhabitable Earth" about climate change killing off all humans, has a terrible Twitter feed telling us how we're going to die sooner than that thanks to COVID -19.

I don't question his stats or his honesty, but in his place, why bother? On Wednesday, post-reconnectivity, I had a brief moment of blue-skies ecstasy walking along Bloor Street. No reason at all.

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